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THEATRE

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Fear of a straight planet

Heterophobia hits the stage in time for Pride
Published September 2, 2010 by [Kenzie Love](#) in [Theatre](#)

Duncan: "But now I know I don't have a choice about this, I was born this way."

Phoebe: "I, I don't know what to say. I mean, you know, you're married to someone for six years and you think you know him and then one day he says, 'Oh, I'm not gay.'"

As this *Friends* episode where Phoebe learns the shocking truth about her ice dancer husband shows, imagining homosexuality as the norm isn't a new idea. But when Calgary playwright Pam Rocker debuted *Heterophobia* at Sage Theatre's Ignite! Festival last year, she felt the scenario still offered fertile ground for both learning and laughs. Audiences seemed to agree: Rocker's story of Grant — a young woman grappling with her taboo attraction to the opposite sex — drew record numbers to the festival for its three shows.

Heterophobia's success pleasantly surprised Rocker, spurring her to create a longer version for the Beyond Closed Doors ensemble to stage during Pride Week. Although the cast and crew faced a bit of a scramble getting the show ready on time, Rocker's happy the play will coincide with an event that reflects its themes.

"I think the relevance comes in a lot of different forms and I think probably the biggest form is awareness," she says. "A big thing about Pride, and the history of Pride and the history of why pride parades are even in existence today, is about really just creating awareness of the portion of society that a lot of people don't want to hear about, or see."

Rocker's personal experience with homophobia helped inspire *Heterophobia*, which she first penned for a playwriting course in 2005. Rocker was a Texan who moved to Canada with her Albertan husband early last decade. She wrote the play while struggling to reconcile her feelings for women with both her marriage and her job at an evangelical church. Accepting her sexuality also meant abandoning a past vision of her life, a conflict she came to address through her writing.

"Growing up in a very evangelical Christian home in Texas, being gay wasn't an option," she says. "It wasn't just evil or bad, it was almost non-existent. To come to the realization that 'Wow, this may be who I am and maybe I can't think it away, maybe I can't wish it away, maybe I can't act it away,' I kind of reached out through my writing a little more. I've been a writer for a long time, but I think then I started searching for more truths."

Rocker's parents won't accept her sexuality, considering it a deviant "choice." But even for more open-minded audiences, she says, the play's offered a new perspective on what it's like to be gay.



DETAILS

Heterophobia presented by Beyond Closed Doors Productions

Motel

Wednesday, September 1 - Saturday, September 11

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“One guy said to me: ‘This is the first time that I feel like I can actually emotionally somewhat relate to what gay people go through, because I saw the discrimination happening the other way around on the stage, and I’d never thought of it that way before.’”

But the play struck a chord on issues beyond sexual orientation for actress Whitney Richter, who plays Grant. Richter lacked a personal coming out experience to base her performance on, but she found she could still identify with the character through different events in her life.

“It’s not necessarily the same circumstance,” she says, “but I can relate to the feeling of how she’s struggling about telling her parents something, or struggling with her best friend, telling her best friend she’s in love with him. That’s been very easy for me.”

Rocker has no didactic message she’s determined audiences take away from the play, but she’s hopeful it may get people to question some of their long-held assumptions about homosexuality — attitudes she’s tried hard to change in her own life.

“If there’s one thing that I wish that a lot of people in my life who are very strongly against it (would do),” she says, “it’s that they would just honestly open their minds and think about it. A lot of things that we staunchly disagree or agree with, I think we don’t even realize that we haven’t put a lot of thought into why we do or why we don’t.”

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